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1:00 - Creative Writing

Mrs. Graham

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Memoirs of the Jazz Age

    “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter--tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning---- So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

- The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

I wish I lived in the Jazz Age. I cannot get enough of flappers and jazz music and smoky nightclubs. What? Am I crazy? No, I think I’m quite sane. Why would I want to go back then, when I live in the 21st century, with all its technology and “knowledge at your fingertips” and iPods and texting and tweeting and Facebook, why indeed? Maybe it’s because of all of these things, these ‘technologies’. We are isolating ourselves with technology and social media networks. By acting as communication, they’re emulating real person-to-person contact, and we are assuming that we are talking to people; while instead, we are isolating ourselves from others. Talking to real people is a lot different from emailing them or writing on their Wall on Facebook, and because of this, our communication skills are sinking slowly downward. Even the clothes that we wear aren’t comfortable for us. Where are the values so dearly held on to by past generations?  
I’ve recently been on campus at Illinois State University, and what surprised me is, first of all, the amount of people that are walking around, going from place to place, and second, that they all had some sort of a technology outlet. None of them were sitting idly, just staring into space or talking to a friend. All of them had headphones in, were texting or talking on their cell phones, or had laptops. I could not find a single person who didn’t have any sort of thing to distract them. The very few people that didn’t have technology out were hurriedly walking somewhere - probably to class. A bit more interesting than the fact that they all seemed to be “plugged in” to technology is what I was actually doing there. I was meditating. (I had my eyes closed and everything!) I was sitting in the middle of the Quad at ISU with my history teacher, meditating.  
What I find fascinating is that none of them noticed – no one! All of these college students were just going about their daily business like nothing interesting was happening. My question is why did no one look at us oddly? I’m not saying I want to be stared at, but really, nobody noticed us at all! Even if they did, their technology distracted them. It’s already quite impossible to focus with the barrage of noises and people, let alone with the added technology. Social media is not by itself bad, and in fact has brought about many rebellions and overthrows of dictators in Africa and the Middle East, but that doesn’t mean that we are always using it for good. While we were all posting pictures of ourselves on Facebook and writing comments next to them, real life was and is actually going on outside our small worlds. It would be nice to live in the “olden” days, where there was no such thing as social media, and you had to actually leave your house in order to talk to friends. I would like to be connected to real life, and not isolated in my own house because of distractions like social media and technology.  
Nowadays, if you think “nightclub” or “huge house party”, you would probably think of girls wearing revealing outfits, and ‘grinding’ with random guys (who are probably sagging their pants) and dancing to generic pop-rap-electronic “music” with glitter and strobe lights, perhaps with an overabundance of alcohol and drugs. But my idea of a nightclub is different - a smoky, dark, warm club with people and colors and jazz music and laughter. My idea of a house party is girls wearing pretty dresses and spinning in circles (and actually dancing properly!) around men in suits, loud music, maybe some ice sculptures, and just an air of fun. It’s not that 21st century parties aren’t fun, as I’m sure they are, but it’s just that sometimes, I would like to have everyone at a party stop. Just completely stop doing everything. And then really look at what they’re doing, and how they’re dancing, and what clothes they’re wearing. I would like to know how, from a completely outside perspective, they feel about what they’re actually doing.  
I see girls in suggestive outfits, and they look completely uncomfortable. They’re always adjusting a strap or pulling down a hemline, and they look as though they’re unhappy and their clothes are ill-fitting. If those girls were absolutely fine and most importantly, comfortable wearing clothes like that, then they would probably stop adjusting their outfits. I’m always afraid that something is going to break on their dresses; the outfits are so fragile looking! I’m not at all against freedom of dress; I love that we can wear whatever we want, whenever we want, but if you aren’t comfortable in your own clothing, then why are you wearing it? What does it say about society? Consider children’s clothing. There are always huge outcries over the messages that clothing and the fashion industry sends to girls, over-sexualizing little girls’ clothing by offering items such as low-cut spaghetti strap tops and bikinis, for kids! Why is this necessary? Children are the next generation, and if we are already showing them items like this, then what will the future be like? It’s the same with dancing. Dancing nowadays consists of ‘grinding’. That’s about it. I watched a movie clip from my favorite book-turned-movie, The Great Gatsby, and it was of a large party, where people were dancing, and their dancing was so different from ours. Of course, it was considered risqué at the time, as grinding is risqué now, but the type of dancing that was in The Great Gatsby was different. I wish people could still dance like that. I wish I could dance like that.  
Sometimes I wonder if I’m the only one who has this sense of “false” nostalgia - a longing for times past, times that we could not possibly have been alive for, and desiring to go back and relive them. People must always think that the generations before them had it better. People who lived in the 1990s probably looked back at the 1960s and 1970s and wished they could turn back time. I look at the year now and the years to come and I wish I could find a time machine and go back. We would probably like to think that we are a society of good values and good beliefs, and sometimes we do have good values, but at other times I look at the world and I see hatred, corruption, sadness, and an aura of apathy. No one in the world wants to interact with each other. “Well, of course I’d like to stay and chat.” Thom Yorke, the lead singer of Radiohead, uses this line in a jazz song. People don’t want to do that anymore. They always have someplace to go, something to do, or technology distracting them from actually interacting in real life.  
We’re all letting the world pass by us and not stopping to “smell the roses”, have fun, and live! Those who were alive during the Jazz Age knew how to live. They cared for each other. They actually talked to their next-door neighbors. And that’s why I want to go back in time so badly. Everyone has somewhere to go now. What if we didn’t have somewhere to go? What if people didn’t have things to do, and people to see, and Facebook to update? Our society would be completely different. The past generations had the right idea. I hope our future generations will as well.